

Introduction to “Las Vegas As Command Center” Special Section

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I first started working with the Las Vegas gaming industry in 1987, when I moved to Nevada to assume the CEO position for the largest commercial bank in the state. Given the bank’s role as the largest commercial bank lender to the gaming industry, I had both the opportunity and the obligation to develop clear perspectives on the threats that the city’s major gaming companies faced. The competitive landscape was quite simple in those days -- certainly relative to what we see today.

As I moved more directly into the gaming industry in the early 1990s, the industry had begun an incredible transformation. By the time I retired as President of Boyd Gaming Corporation in 2005, Las Vegas gaming had been “reinvented” multiple times, casinos had spread across the United States, and international gaming expansion was well on its way toward becoming a true global force -- driven largely by Las Vegas-based gaming companies.

Today, there are many who lament Las Vegas’ decline; but in this issue we are introduced to some scholarly perspectives that re-frame this issue. Perhaps Las Vegas is not experiencing a decline so much as it is experiencing a transformation -- a transformation into a global command center that stands behind much of what goes on in the international gaming world. Perhaps the city has become, much as Houston has, a place where specific kinds of intellectual capital are concentrated. So perhaps, the city is once again winning, despite suggestions that its future is bleak.

Even if this more optimistic view is accurate, we must also realize that the city’s key industry faces challenges that it has never faced before, from international and internet competitors alike. In this competitive, challenging environment, it becomes more crucial than ever to value the kinds of intellectual capital that the global gaming marketplace demands. This realization, of course, underscores the importance of educating an elite cadre of leaders who are able to drive this transformation.

As I have traveled throughout Asia in my new role as Dean, I have been impressed by Las Vegas’ presence in small and large places. From friendly hotel managers who spent their undergraduate careers at UNLV, to megaresort concepts that very clearly were invented on the Strip, the city’s stamp is visible all over the Asian region. These observations clearly point to the visionary work of those industry leaders who created the Las Vegas which the rest of the world has found attractive. From Steve Wynn (who showed us that the continuing re-invention of the megaresort truly expands demand and respect for the Las Vegas product), to Terry Lanni (who brought his brand of collaborative leadership to the industry), to Sheldon Adelson (who convinced us that the business-oriented convention crowd could successfully co-exist with the leisure crowd), to Jerry Vallen (who saw the need to create a very special brand of hospitality education at UNLV), we now have the opportunity to build upon a foundation truly created in Las Vegas. These observations also remind us that the history books will also recognize the visionary leaders of today, as they craft innovative new gaming “products” in spaces that would have been unimaginable to their predecessors.

In this spirit, we provide you with this special section of *UNLV Gaming Research and Review Journal*, intended to both focus and broaden this vital debate of the day.

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